

Common Reactions to Traumatic Events

Although traumatic events may affect people differently, there are some common reactions. These signs and symptoms may begin immediately. Or, you may feel fine for days or even weeks, and then suddenly be hit with a reaction. It is normal for people to experience immediate or even delayed emotional distress following a traumatic event.

Physical Reactions

- Insomnia
- Fatigue, hyperactivity or “nervous energy”
- Pain in the neck or back
- Headaches
- Heart palpitations or pains in the chest
- Dizzy spells
- Appetite changes

Emotional Reactions

- Flashbacks or “reliving” the event
- Excessive jumpiness or tendency to be startled
- Irritability
- Anger
- Feelings of anxiety or helplessness
- Feeling vulnerable

Usually, the signs and symptoms of trauma will lessen with time. If you are concerned about your reaction, note the specific symptoms that worry you. For each symptom, note the:

Duration—Normally, trauma reactions will grow less intense and disappear within a few weeks.

Intensity—If the reaction interferes with your ability to carry on your life normally, you may want to seek help.

Tips for Coping After a Traumatic Event

As you are experiencing various emotions resulting from a traumatic event, below are suggestions that may help:

- Physical exercise along with relaxation may help relieve the physical stress.
- Talk to people; talking can be very healing.
- Spend time with others; resist the tendency to isolate.
- Give yourself permission to feel sad and share your feelings with others.
- Keep a journal; write your way through sleepless times.
- Get plenty of rest and eat regular meals, even if you don’t feel like it.